

BOYS AND GIRLS

Little 'All Black.'

He was our first pony, and brother Maddy and I valued him accordingly.

We were the sons of a hard-working Pennsylvania farmer, and our greatest pleasure and recreation was a daily scamper along the valley road, on the glossy back of pretty All Black. He was, indeed, rightly named. His thin satin coat was of midnight blackness. He was gentle, too, and possessed a wonderful amount of endurance and go. He had been given us by our wealthy Philadelphia uncle, Clement Madoc Holt, because my twin brother and I were both his namesakes. We were twelve then, and thoroughly dissatisfied with our busy, prosaic home life.

'Clem,' said Maddy, the first September day of 1860, 'we have worked harder this summer than any boys of our age in the whole country. I'm sick of it all, and so are you. Suppose we end it by going right away!'

'You mean by running off?'

'Yes, Clem, I mean that. We will go to Uncle Holt in Philadelphia.'

'But it's miles and miles from here, and we haven't much money,' I added reluctantly.

Yet Maddy only laughed.

'I know it, Clem. All Black can carry us both, and it won't cost a penny. We want an education, and we want to get rich, like Uncle Holt. We never will here on father's farm.'

'But, Maddy,' I put in, uneasily, 'can we—should we leave mother?'

Our eyes fell to the four bare feet on the ground before us. Dear, patient, uncomplaining mother! For a moment we had both forgotten her.

'Steve is ten now, and 'most as tall as we are,' replied Maddy at last. 'He'll be good to mother, never fear!'

'But we are her eldest sons,' I suggested again, with only half emphasis.

'She'll be glad enough that we went, if we come home rich some day, and grown-up men at that.'

'But she may die before that,' I faltered. 'Don't say or think of it, Clem. We have our own way to make, an' we've got to make it! No help from father or mother either, for that matter. We've got to go, and now for the 'rangements. We have two good suits apiece, and they can go into one bundle. In fact, Clem, they are tied up already, down in the bushes by the lane gate.'

'Why, Madoc Holt,' I cried in astonishment.

'You see, I've thought about it a long time,' he went on. 'You can ride All Black to-night as usual, an' wait for me out in the road.'

'But won't we tell mother good-bye?'

'It can't be, Clem. She'd read us right through in a minute.'

'All right,' I said, slowly, for a great lump rose in my throat at the thought.

After chores, I stole back to the kitchen.

'Mother,' I asked with assumed carelessness, 'may Maddy and I ride All Black?'

'Of course, child. Don't you do it every night of your lives?'

I kissed her for the answer, and turned to walk away.

'Clem,' she called, 'are you sick?'

'No, mother.'

'Be careful of the pony. Father thinks he isn't well. Don't go far, and be back before dark.'

And I went on without a word. Brother Steve was whistling in the wood-shed, and father was down in the poultry yard. Maddy, I knew, was waiting for me out in the road.

I saddled All Black, and was off in a moment. I had left home!

'Clem,' cried Maddy from the hedge. 'I guess it's all right all around. I've got the clothes and we'll put on our second best suits right here.'

It was hurriedly done. Indeed, I never remember dressing in less time. And soon we were up and away.

'We've 160 pounds for All Black's back,' I said, with a forced laugh. 'Father thinks he's sick, but that's nonsense.'

'We'll reach Philadelphia in a week,' said Maddy. 'We're no weight at all for a Canadian pony.'

'What will we do when we get there?' I ventured.

'Work,' said Maddy again.

'But won't we go to Uncle Holt's?'

'Not at first. He would send us back on sight. And we've got to sell All Black. Errand boys don't ride on horseback, and I, for one, am going into a grocery. See if I don't have a store of my own in ten years' time.'

'You'll let me tend it for you, Maddy?'

'Of course. But you ain't ambitious enough, Clem. You must earn a store, too.'

'Uncle Holt may help us.'

'Perhaps—perhaps not. Better not depend on him for anything.'

All Black was going at a good gait. I looked back, and our farmhouse was already out of sight.

'Maddy,' I ventured to say again, 'where are we going to spend the night?'

'Oh, I don't know. In the woods somewhere, I guess.'

I shivered at his answer. If there was ever a coward born, it was myself, Clement Holt. And we were going to sleep in the woods. Why, the thought of it was terror to me.

We hastened on then, for a time in utter silence. I knew Maddy was thinking very hard, and I did not attempt to interrupt him.

Darkness came at last, but we still kept on.

'We're going straight to Philadelphia,' said brother, proudly. 'The lights 'cross there are M—, and we've come four miles already. When we're tired riding, we'll stop in the first woods we come to, and—'

'Why not a farmhouse, Maddy?'

'Oh, folks would see us and know us. It will be bad enough, if we have to ask, now and then, for something to eat.'

'I'm hungry now.'

'But we both had supper; and only babies whine.'

'I'm tired, too, Maddy.'

'You ain't as strong as me, I know. But All Black must be the tiredest. I fed him well, and I'm glad of it. He walks as though he was lame.'

'Mebbe he's sick, as father said.'

'Stuff, Clem! You're a croaker from Croakersville. Here's a nice bit of woods, and the grass and leaves will make a fine bed.'

'Ain't you 'fraid, Maddy?'

'What of?'

'Oh, ghosts and lots of things.'

'You'd better turn 'round and go home.'

'No,' I decided then and there, 'I'm going to Philadelphia with you.'

So Maddy hitched All Black to a maple tree, and we lay down for the night. Our extra suits from the bundle we used for covering. But the air was chilly, and the grass was damp. The pony was restless, too, and kept pawing the ground about him. So Maddy and I did not sleep, and before daylight we arose, feeling both stiff and tired.

'Let's go on,' said brother, without even a whistle. 'We may reach a farmhouse where they'll give us breakfast. I've got a dollar, and we won't beg till we have to. Come, Clem.'

And we remounted All Black, who gave a dissatisfied snort. The road forked just ahead, as we could see, even in the darkness.

'Which way, now, Maddy?'

'We'll turn to the right,' he answered, unhesitatingly. 'I've heard father say that Philadelphia is exactly north-east of us.'

And turn to the right we did. All Black went faster then, and it both surprised and pleased us.

'He must be feeling better,' said Maddy. 'There's nothing like an early start. By daylight we may be five miles further on.'

'And five miles further from home,' I added with a sigh.

'To be sure, Clem. No prodigal sons for me. I wouldn't go back for a farm!'

And our next mile was gone over in silence. All Black limped a good deal, but he was still making time.

When daylight came at last, we began to look around us.

'The road doesn't look a bit strange,' I said to Clem.'

'I wonder where we are, Maddy?'

'I hardly know.'

'Why, there's a house just like neighbor John Fenton's,' I cried. 'It is Fenton's, Maddy, and there runs his dog Scramble!'

'Yes, that's Scramble,' echoed brother, in thorough disgust. 'We just turned around in the dark, and came home by the other road. It's plain as the alphabet, Clem.'

'And here comes father,' I cried again, after a second look at an approaching horseman.

'It's all up with us, Clem! All Black has brought us home. No use trying to get away again now!'

We stopped short, then, till father came up to us.

'Good morning, boys!'

But we only hung our heads.

'Breakfast is ready,' he went on, with a curious smile. 'Mother sent me in search of you. All Black must be hungry, too. Glad you changed your minds about going to Philadelphia.'

'Were you coming after us, father?' I interrupted, gratefully.

'Certainly.'

I looked at Maddy, and his face was a study. Pride and anger, joy and gratitude were struggling for the mastery.

'It is good to be 'most home again,' he admitted, honestly. 'I guess our getting